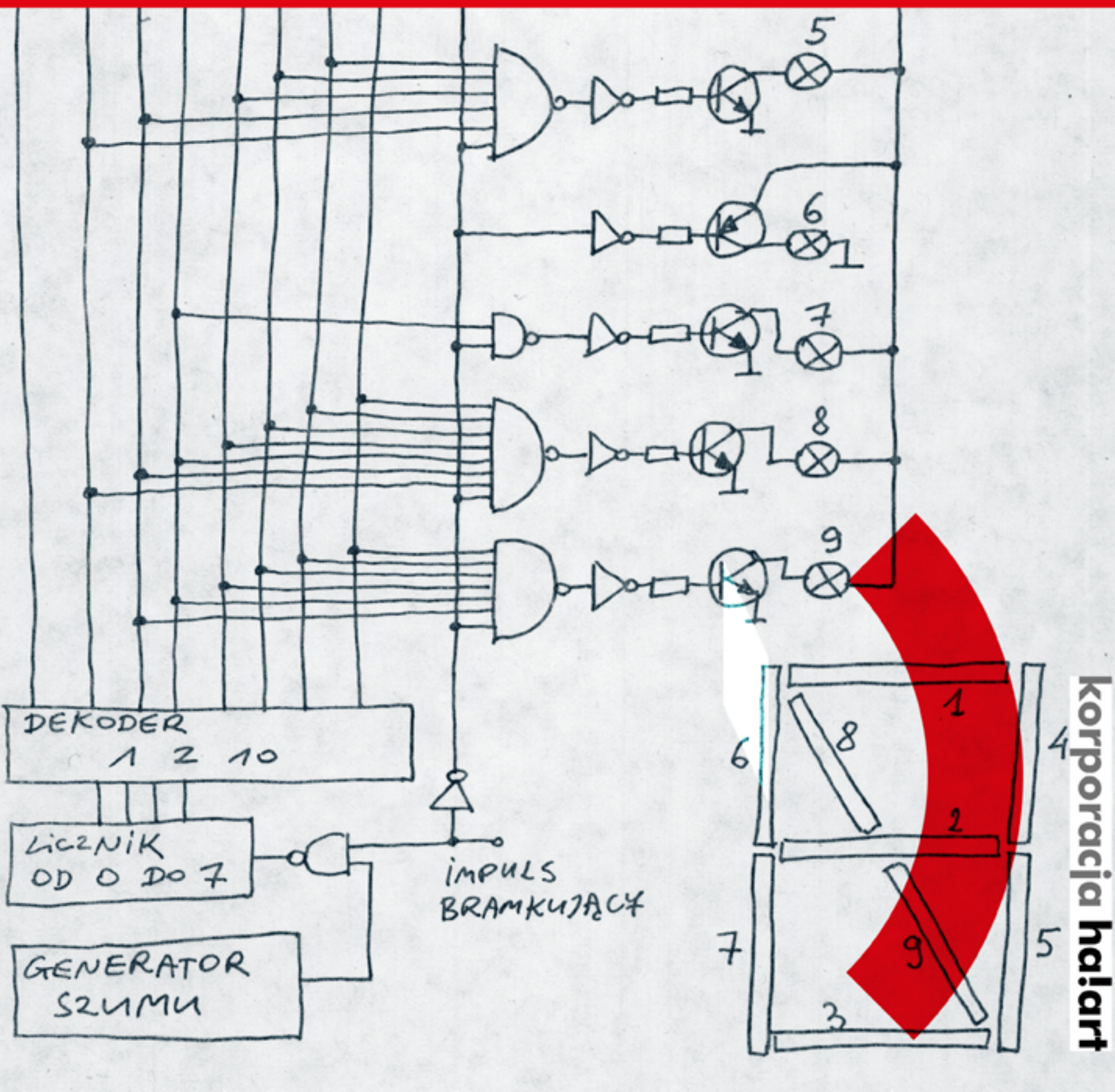
obsessive anticipation



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Translation

Aleksandra Małecka

Proofreading

Scotia Gilroy

Typesetting

Katarzyna Janota

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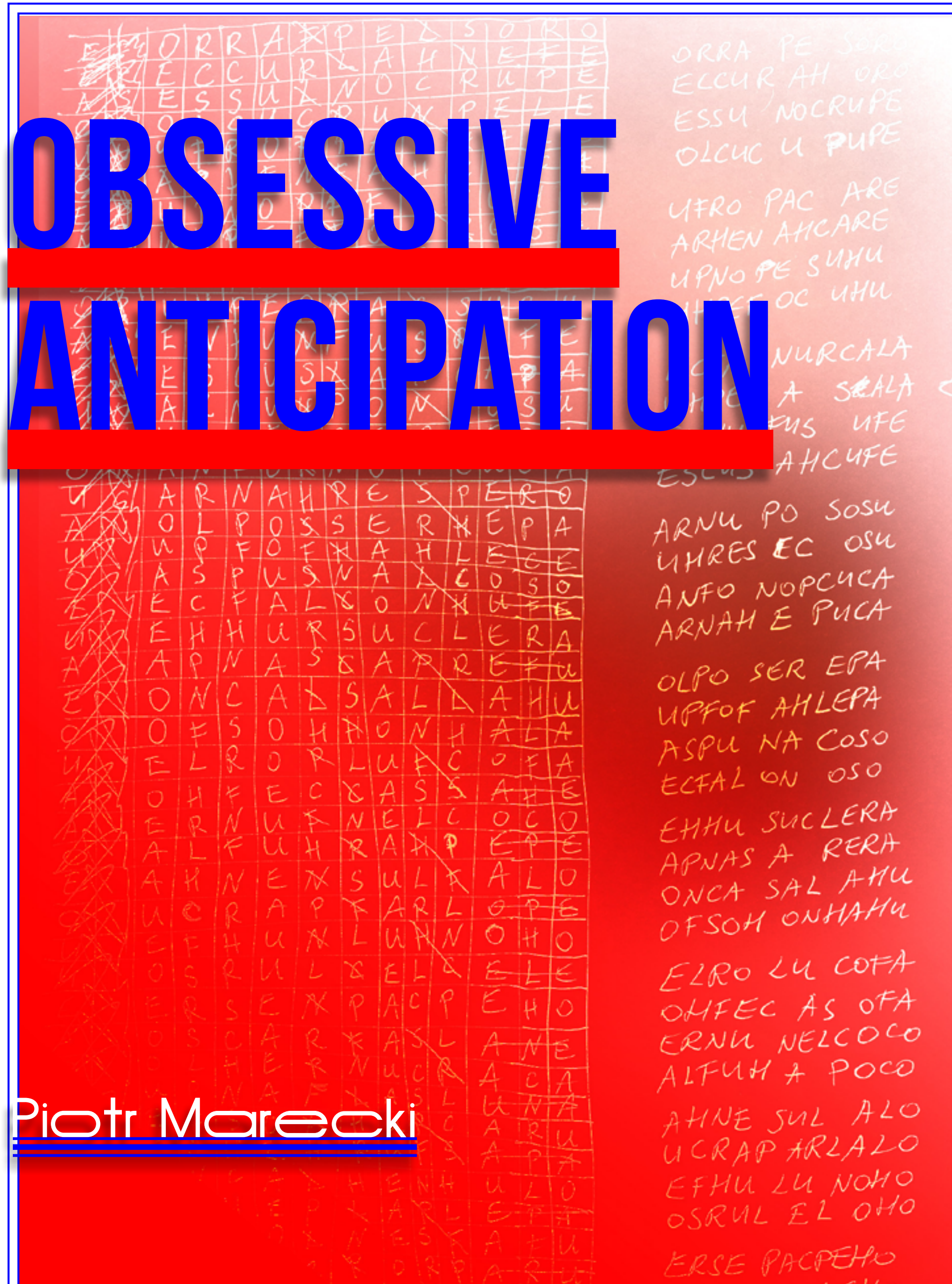
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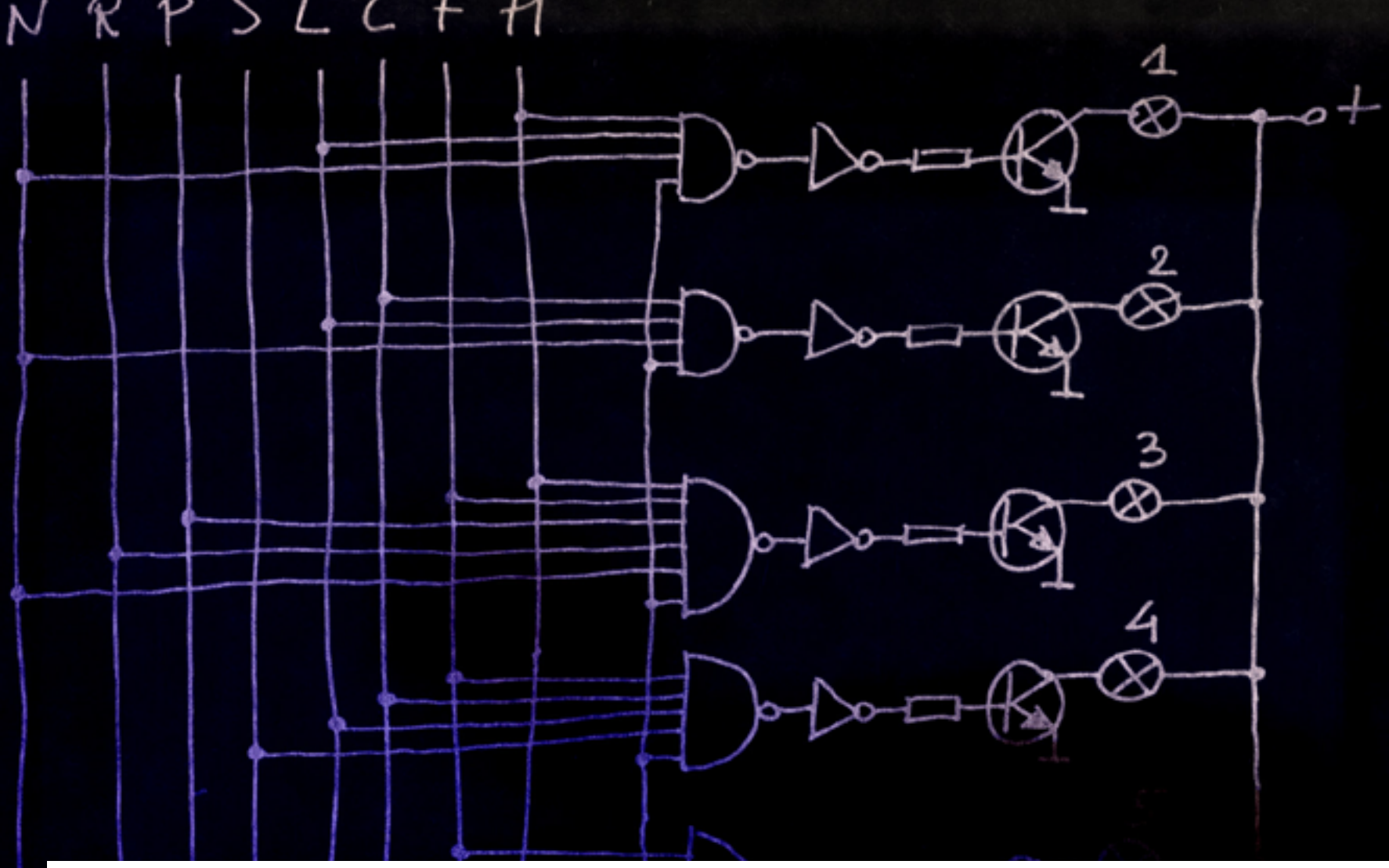
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OBSESSIVE ANTICIPATION

Piotr Marecki



Wojciech Bruszewski's work embraces all sorts of technologies: it is difficult to unambiguously assign him to one particular domain. Selected works of subject literature list visual arts, film, literature, music, radio, performance and photography within the scope of his activity. It is also often underlined that the author of the book *Fotograf* required from art the same as he required from science. He believed that art should use all possible means to explore reality. For this reason, his works combine sound, word and image; the fulfillment of this aim is also sought through the employment of computers, very sensitive electronic devices, acoustic generators, and modified cameras. With these devices the artist consequently and compulsively tested the world. They enabled him to show it in a hallucinatory manner. Thanks to them, Bruszewski was, in a way, on the one hand, an artist-engineer, and on the other hand, an artist-researcher. Ryszard W. Kluszczyński, an expert in Bruszewski's media art, notes:

(…) Bruszewski studied particularly closely the relations between reality and its audiovisual representation, and between the viewer and reality and its representation (to subsequently transfer these analyses to the field of video art). He especially underlined the duality of the notion of reality, distinguishing between the material dimension (what exists beyond us) and its mental dimension (what it is for us). This second meaning was treated by him as a product of culture, a collection of conventions, which in consequence led him to assume the thesis that our contact with reality does not have an immediate character, but is mediated through language. Bruszewski also observed that mechanical and electronic media (photography, film, video, etc.) function in part independently from the rules governing our mind – that the image of the world communicated by them is not identical to our own representation of it, unequivocally subordinate to existing cultural cognitive conventions.[1]

Wojciech Bruszewski's first works belonged to the fields of film and visual arts. His path was the typical path of a Polish filmmaker: he graduated from the Faculty of Cinematography and Television Production (1970) and the Faculty of Film and Television Direction (1975) at the Polish National Film, Television and Theater School in Łódź. Together with his friends from the field of visual arts he brought to the famous school an interest in form and avant-garde. In the seventies he was one of the pillars of

1 **R. W. Kluszczyński**, "*Przestrzenie generatywności. Wprowadzenie do twórczości Wojciecha Bruszewskiego*," Dialog 2012, no. 7/8, p. 152.

the Łódź-based group Warsztat Formy Filmowej (WFF), formed by artists such as Ryszard Waśko, Józef Robakowski, Paweł Kwiek and Zbigniew Rybczyński. This period in the history of Polish cinema is still considered the only time when artists began to seriously think about the role of form in film. Bruszewski himself expressed the following opinion on the WFF and how it was misunderstood in film circles:

> At the film school we were a group of rebels, dissatisfied with the academic program. After the first year of studies we decided that there was nothing our lecturers could teach us and that we had to turn to self-education We imposed on ourselves a scientific program… I was most interested in the human-like machine. For example, a camera that sees and we see, or a device that hears and we hear. While studying these machines I always reflected upon myself… All the things that I value in some way were always an attempt at understanding the consciousness, the hypothetical consciousness of the machine…[2]

WFF's interests comprised the study of the medium of film itself, including the discussion of conceptual approaches and breaking with the esthetical and literary perspective. Through his engagement with the avant-garde formation from Łódź, Bruszewski became part of the model of structural film, which was the globally dominating tendency at the time, and proposed his variety of it – analytical film. It is of note that Wojciech Bruszewski

2 *Wojciech Bruszewski. Fenomeny percepcji* (exhibition catalogue, Łódź City Art Gallery), E. Fuchs, J. Zagrodzki (eds.), Łódź 2010, p. 175.

was the precursor of video art in Poland. Although, like every student of the Łódź school, the artist made his debut with shorts filmed on tape, he was the first to propose a work in that new form (*Pictures Languages*, 1973), and he also participated in the first Polish museum presentation of video art at the Łódź Museum of Art in 1973.

From the early eighties onwards he functioned both as an artist and lecturer (in the years 1981-1996 he was a professor at the Poznań Academy of Fine Arts and at the Mikołaj Kopernik University in Toruń, and from 2005 he taught at the Higher School of Art and Design in Łódź). It was also at this time that he first became interested in computers.

During the many years of his artistic work, Bruszewski used the Amiga computer in his projects, but when this type of computer lost the market battle to the PC, he gave up programming.

As Jerzy Zagrodzki, Bruszewski's biographer, puts it, the artist was characterized by "obsessive anticipation." Although the word and text were media explored by the artist from the very beginning of his career, experts in the field of literature gained interest in him only towards the end of his life[3], when in 2007 he published the novel *Fotograf*,[4] in which he portrays the status of avant-garde artists in Communist Poland. And although the book was published in traditional print, it differed from a classically constructed novel. Bruszewski wanted to imitate a photographic structure, recreate the narrative as if it were being told through a series of photographs. The publication's critical reception was

3 Wojciech Bruszewski died in 2009, two years after the publication of his novel *Fotograf* (Kraków 2007).

4 Cf. **W. Bruszewski**, *Fotograf*, Kraków 2007.

characterized by disbelief and enthusiasm. Tadeusz Nyczek's voice is characteristic for the general reaction:

> I can't believe my eyes. Not only is this a perfectly normal book, but an excellent one at that! A full-hearted novel, with characters, plots, anecdotes, historical facts, a pinch of eroticism, excellent observations, and, what is more, written with a boundless sense of humor. This filmmaker, photographer, and actionist has proved to be a remarkable artist of the pen, far surpassing dozens of our professionals who knit their paragraphs with a sense of fulfilling a historic mission.[5]

Much more interesting in terms of experimental solutions and the use of new media is the artist's second novel – *Big Dick*. Bruszewski wrote this work the same year he finished *Fotograf* (at the same time he also created the play *Dryl*, published in 2012 by „Dialog" magazine[6]) and prepared it for print on his own. However, *Big Dick* was eventually published only in 2013. The main character of the novel is a man named Richard von Hakenkreuz, who comes to Europe at the beginning of the 20th century from Africa, bringing a swastika with him. The plot stretches through the entire 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, ending a couple of years after the removal of the Nazi symbol from Microsoft Word software. The author labeled the genre "documental fiction."

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5 **T. Nyczek**, "Czytanie na trawie… czyli fotograf pisze Fotografa," Przekrój 2008, no. 26, p. 48.

6 Cf. idem, "*Dryl,*" Dialog 2012, no. 7/8.

Bruszewski's anticipations formulated over three decades ago proved to become part of the poetics of innovative projects in contemporary literature. Today no one is surprised by the use of machines and computers in the creative process; among others, cybernetic poets have been practicing this mode of production in the field of Polish literature for several years. It often happens that during author meetings pieces are randomly generated with the audience's participation and read by speech synthesizers; communication noise is used as part of the poetics. It is also nothing new for artists to work with computer code, and the knowledge of computer programs is often part of the contemporary poet's trade.

The aim of this chapbook is to present Bruszewski's works situated at the junction of literature and other media, meaning both generative projects (analyzed here by Tomasz Załuski and Mariusz Pisarski), as well as literary works published in the form of traditional novels (discussed in the section containing a collection of voices from several critics).

REMEDIATING THE WORD — REMEDIATING EXPERIENCE

TEXTUAL MACHINES IN WOJCIECH BRUSZEWSKI'S WORK[1]

[1] The first, expanded version of this text was published in the collective volume *Liberatura, e-literatura i… Remiksy, remediacje, redefinicje*, M. Górska-Olesińska (ed.), Opole 2012, pp. 85-106.

Tomasz Załuski

Idee tkwią w narzędziach.[1]

(Ideas lie in the tools)

Wojciech Bruszewski

In *Problem Satori*, a manifesto written in 1973, Wojciech Bruszewski questions the belief that people brought up in European culture are able to experience the world in an immediate manner, without any signs of mediation or codes. He underlines that "our perception of the world, shaped by European culture, our way of contacting reality, is not immediate in character, but linguistic. Language, in turn, is a category of thought."[2] Language – and, more precisely, the conventional, cultural system of words and concepts – constructs and shapes a certain image of the world, enables a certain type of access to reality, but simultaneously conditions and limits this access.

A chance of overcoming this limitation seems to lie in mechanical reproduction: images technologically registered by camera are sometimes able to purify the reality perceived by us from clichés of language and thought projected onto it, and thus enrich our perception, giving it access to new aspects of the world. The problem is that language is not only one of the many media mediating human cognition, but also a privileged medium, a meta-medium that mediates the access to all other media. Language and the language-based "culture of the word"[3] shape

[1] **W. Bruszewski**, (untitled typescript, dated August 18th 1988), M. Kamińska-Bruszewska's archive.

[2] **W. Bruszewski**, *Rozmowy o sztuce, poznaniu i języku,* Łódź 1974, chapter *Bruszewski,* p. 6. Each chapter of this script has its own page numeration, so in further notes I shall cite the page number together with the title of the appropriate chapter.

[3] Warsztat Formy Filmowej, *Manifest*, (in:) *Żywa galeria. Łódzki progresywny ruch*

the traditional ways of using media for mechanical reproduction, causing the image created by them to remain a schematic construct, limiting our chances to experience reality.

Bruszewski assumed, however, that mechanical reproduction media offer means of gaining knowledge about the world that transcend verbal expression. These media function in part independently from our mind and can create a different image of the world, one broader than that given us by the conceptual conventions and experience schemes shaped by the culture of the word. "Technical devices offer us not only what corresponds with our notions, but also that which does not. (…) For the mind, this is an opportunity for renewal, an opportunity to transcend the schemes around which 'humanist' culture revolves."[4] As a result, technical devices force us to "update our data, adapt the structure of the mind to the structure of the world refashioned by these devices."[5] The broadened cognitive scope of these media devices is, however, not simply available in the form of ready structures. It needs to be discovered. This requires freeing the technical media from the hegemony of the culture of the word and finding new ways of using them, transcending the "scheme of imposed manuals."[6] It is thus necessary to subject these media to remediation – a transmedia hybridization that would function like McLuhan's "technique of creative discovery,"[7] and would awaken our numbed senses, reconfigure the entire

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artystyczny 1969-1981, J. Robakowski (ed.), Łódź 2000, p. 162.

[4] After: J. Zagrodzki, *Wojciech Bruszewski (8 marca 1947 – 6 września 2009). Kalendarium działań artystycznych*, (in:) *Wojciech Bruszewski. Fenomeny percepcji* (exhibition catalogue, City Art Gallery in Łódź), E. Fuchs, J. Zagrodzki (eds.), Łódź 2010, p. 137.

[5] After: op. cit., p. 136.

[6] **J. Zagrodzki**, *Wojciech Bruszewski. Fenomeny percepcji*, (in:) *Wojciech Bruszewski. Fenomeny percepcji,* op. cit., p. 13.

[7] **M. McLuhan**, *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man, Corte Madera 2003*, p. 80.

sensorium and generate in ourselves a new conceptual and cognitive apparatus.

However, in order to successfully challenge the hegemony of the culture of the word, the word itself has to be remediated. It can no longer unilaterally shape the access to technical media and dictate them its "logic." On the contrary – it should become open to their "mechanics." We must transcend the traditional, logocentric notion and practice of the word, we must – through the mediation of technical media – emphasize the material and technical "layer" of words and invent new ways of using them. This will help us challenge the privileged status of the word, limit its metamediating character and include it in the sphere of technical media. Not only will it cease to block the use of media for refashioning and broadening our experience of reality, but it will itself be able to become the material for such experiments, a field for "techniques of creative reproduction." Thus, remediations of the word in Bruszewski's art are, at the same time, remediations of experience.

When searching for alternative ways of using language itself, Bruszewski suggests applying the "method" sketched out by Jorge Luis Borges in his short story *The Library of Babel*. The method consists of "acquiring all information about reality through exhausting all the possible combinations of the letters of the alphabet."[8] This idea is clearly based on the assumption that notions or linguistic "word-notions" do not as much reflect "ready" reality as rather construct and discover it for the cognizing subject. The limited number of words available to us in a particular language gives us limited access to the world. Hence the idea that the

[8] **W. Bruszewski**, *Rozmowy o sztuce, poznaniu i języku*, op. cit., chapt. *Bruszewski*, p. 6.

expansion of this access, the opening to previously unavailable aspects of reality, could be triggered by the appearance of new words. However, won't all the words that we can create "from the inside" of the present linguistic system and of an image of the world governed by it be automatically inscribed into this image of the world and confirm its boundaries instead of transgressing them? This is a reasonable assumption. Hence the necessity of another creative agent, an external, nonhuman, "mechanical" one. This is offered by the "combinatory" method sketched out by Borges, consisting of variations/permutations (with repetition) of all the letters of the alphabet. It provides the idea of a textual machine that enables the generation of these new "words," while they, in turn, generate new worlds.[9]

The method in question is based on "the reversal of the relation reality – message – image of reality or on (…) a change of hierarchy (…) between the signified and the signifier."[10] As a result, the signified is expressed as a function of the signifier, and, more precisely, as an effect constructed by it. This way the "new," artificially generated words preserve in them the mechanism of reference, that is the gesture of referring to the "designated," and so this type of activity can provide "the proof of the existence of a reality that we never experience, and the presence of which we can only suspect."[11] Therefore, art in itself does not create a new

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[9] In one of the later texts, the artist writes, "Was the word in the beginning? If so, if the word (the idea) 'chair' materialized into a piece of furniture for sitting, then new combinations of letters can lead to the creation of new worlds" (W. Bruszewski, *Sonety*, "working title" 2005, no. 1-2, pages not numbered).

[10] **W. Bruszewski**, *Rozmowy o sztuce, poznaniu i języku*, op. cit., chapt. *Bruszewski*, p. 6.

[11] Ibid., *Bruszewski*, p. 7. The artist specifies this issue in one of the conversations: "By 'language' I mean (…) replacing one thing with another. Under the condition that both things remain somehow connected. For instance, we replace a chair with the word 'chair.' If, for example, I film reality, I do not experience it immediately, I have contact with its recording. If I later take this image and modify it somehow; for example, I reverse it

image of reality. It rather constitutes "pure speculation" about the possibility of creating it and is "only a projection of certain possibilities."[12] Art designs the conditions of the possibility of the discovery/existence of new worlds, and attempts to generate and multiply pure potentialities.

Already in his early works, Bruszewski aimed to surpass the conventional ways of using the media in which he operated. He began with photography. In his texts written in the late sixties and early seventies, he underlined its anti-illusionist, material and indexical character, pointing also to the possibility of a departure from "photographic paper" and the need to "challenge the hegemony of the rectangle in photography."[13] Freed from these limitations and reduced to mere indexicality, photography could be subject to various remediations. Bruszewski listed a number of them: pressing bodies covered with white paint onto black paper, Fryderyk Chopin's death mask, Alina Szapocznikow's body casts, the "police fingerprint" and the human shadow burned into a wall after the atomic bomb explosion in Hiroshima.[14] Some of the artist's works from this period have the form of photographic objects realized on different surfaces.

1970 saw the creation of *Tekst* (*Text*) – a photographic canvas with printed text, hung on a wall in such a way that only fragments of words or individual letters were visible between its folds. It made reading impossible and contested the heteroreferentiality of the text, emphasizing its materiality in return. Bruszewski commented

and I wonder: if I have reversed this 'objective' image, does this mean that reality is also reversible in such a way?" (ibid., *Jurkiewicz*, p. 2).

[12] Ibid., *Jurkiewicz*, p. 5.

[13] After: J. Zagrodzki, *Wojciech Bruszewski (8 marca 1947 – 6 września 2009)*, op. cit., p. 40 and 45.

[14] Cf. ibid., p. 40.


ext

that "in the case of text, the material layer seems to be transparent, but what would text be without the typographic, calligraphic or vocal element."[15] A year later, the artist came up with the series *Fotografie dźwięku (Photographs of Sound)*: a recording of sound on film tape was used as a template for visualizations of sounds (such as "oh!") on long strips of photographic paper.

Such projects enabled the artist to access the infrastructure level of the word and treat it as an anagrammatical audiovisual aggregate. This, in turn, allowed for the application of Borges's combinatorial method. In 1972, Bruszewski realized two versions of a work titled *Nowe słowa* (*New Words*) or *Maszyna do nowych słów (New Word Machine)*. In the first version, the "machine" was made of five cubes strung on a piece of rope stretched between two posts. The sides of the cubes featured single letters, the rows of which formed "words" nonexistent in the Polish language. It was an interactive object: by turning the cubes, the viewer-operator could change the combination of letters, and thus create "new words." Through interchanging blocks with vowels and the ones with consonants, Bruszewski ensured that the generated words would be pronounceable. In the second version, the artist replaced the cubes and rope with cylindrical elements on a metal axle. The principle remained the same: by turning the elements the viewer-operator could modify the letter combination visible from a given angle and thus actualize the "combinatorial" capacities of the system. The number of potential letter combinations and "words" could be increased by changing the order of the cylinders.

In the years 1972-1975, Bruszewski created a number of works in

[15] After ibid, p. 43.

ORRA PE SORO
ECCUR AH ORO
ESSU NOCRUPE
OLCUC U PUPE

UFRO PAC ARE
ARHEN AHCARE
UPNO PE SUHU
UHPEF OC UHU

ECFA NURCALA
UHPEP A SCALA
ENHU FUS UFE
ESCUS AHCUFE

ARNU PO SOSU
UHRES EC OSU
ANFO NOPCUCA
ARNAH E PUCA

OLPO SER EPA
UPFOF AHLEPA
ASPU NA COSO
ECFAL ON OSO

EHHU SUCLERA
APNAS A RERA
ONCA SAL AHU
OFSOH ONHAHU

ELRO LU COFA
OHFEC AS OFA
ERNU NELCOCO
ALFUH A POCO



New Word Machine

which he sought unconventional, arbitrary, often absurd ways of "translating" words and letter combinations into certain states and images of reality. This type of work was introduced with *Bezdech* (*Apnoea*) (1972). The artist recorded separate utterances by four people on film tape, then copied the material and edited it into meaningful dialogues by combining "each with each."[16] The resulting film was a subtle parody of the narrative conventions and stylistic codes typical of Polish cinema of the time. However, it also signaled the possibility of going beyond the film effect of reality and creating new compositions of images through combinatorial methods. In the drawings explaining the premise of the work, each person was assigned a letter: A, B, C, D. These letters were linked with lines or arrows which demonstrated the combinatorial mechanism, generating the final shape of the film's narration. It seems that the letter symbols used were treated as mathematical or logical "variables" of sorts and did not have any artistically meaningful relation to the film shots to which they were assigned.

This was not the case in *Język obrazowy (Picture Language)* (1973), the first Polish artistic video tape, co-created with the poet Piotr Bernacki. Bruszewski assigned letters of the alphabet to chosen stills from film footage of a rural outdoor scene, and then transmitted, through a sequence of images coded in this way, an example sentence – an excerpt from instructions for storing luggage issued by the LOT airline company.[17] The work *Tekst-drzwi*

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[16] The combinatorially repeated shots are of course accompanied by scenes and utterances that only appear once throughout the film. They enhance the feeling of the "naturalness" of the situation and conversations.

[17] Cf. W. Bruszewski, *Sonety*, op. cit. Elsewhere Bruszewski talked about "information about the transport of luggage at the LOT company" (W. Bruszewski, *Rozmowa z Wojciechem Bruszewskim*, interview by. T. Samosionek, *Zeszyty Artystyczne* 1994, no. 7, p. 36).

(Text-Door) (1974) was based on a similar principle, although it did not include a presentation of the "code" itself. In this film, letters from a text ("an indecent poem"[18]) arbitrarily determined the opening angle and movement direction of a door: vowels – closing the door, consonants – opening it. Then, the works *Język baletowy (Ballet Language)* and *Wojciech Bruszewski tańczy (Wojciech Bruszewski Dances)* transferred this subject matter into the realm of performative art. The first of these projects included a board with the letters of the alphabet and "dance figures" assigned to them, the second consisted of photos of the artist performing chosen "figures" naked. All of these works demonstrated with almost absurd literalness that language imposes a certain way of organizing and experiencing reality. At the same time, arbitrarily assigning images and states to the letters of the alphabet, and their arrangement to the structure of words, enabled a rejection of the traditional narrative and compositional schemes of film or behavioral and motoric habits, for the sake of creating new types of links.

THESE NEW LINKS, however, still depended on human will, on a subjective human decision. This is why in *Głosowanie (Voting)* (1974-1975) Bruszewski chose a different solution: in editing the visual and audial layer of the film he reached for the arbitrariness of random selection. The initial visual material was composed of shots of a hand pointing at a hundred different objects, inside a single static frame, while the audio material comprised single vowels, consonants and inarticulate sounds. The film tape with the visual material was cut and then fragments were assembled in random order. The audio material, recorded on a tape of identical length, was treated likewise. The synchronized ninety-

[18] **W. Bruszewski**, *Sonety*, op. cit.

second sequence was included in the film *Żywa Galeria (Living Gallery)* by Józef Robakowski.[19] It presented random correlations of items and sounds, and the sounds formed new, half-articulated "words."

The lecture *Translacje (Translations)* was a crowning of sorts for the experiments in "translating" words into the state of objects. It was presented in 1974 in Osieki, during a performance titled *Kiedy mówię (When I Speak)*. Bruszewski described the situation he devised in the following words:

> (…) in a completely darkened room, the only source of light was a strong bulb hanging over the artist's head. The bulb's light was controlled by a simple electronic circuit, which reacted to sounds. Silence is complete darkness. Scream is maximum brightness. In order to begin reading the text, the author had to say something like "yyy…"[20]

The subject of the text was "contact with the external." There are two types of such contact: linguistic contact and that achieved through means of pure recording and transmission. The first has a privileged character – language mediates our access to technical media and determines the way they are used. This does not mean, however, that we should not seek the type of contact with reality that technical media offer.

[19] **Cf. J. Zagrodzki**, *Wojciech Bruszewski (8 marca 1947 – 6 września 2009)*, op. cit., p. 85.

[20] After ibid., p. 82.

When we achieve this state of contact that is possessed already at this moment by technical means ("I want to be a machine" – Warhol said), when we part with the inhibiting implications of the culture of the word, then every one of us will proudly say "I am a materialist."[21] However, Bruszewski did not believe this would happen soon. Perhaps he even thought that complete liberation from the idealism of the culture of the word, and thus a complete fulfillment of media materialism, was not possible at all. Materialism, to him, was a different, "additional" way of "contacting the external," parallel and asymmetric to linguistic contact. The contact in question would then be accessible to us only as "different," "incomprehensible," occurring beyond the control of our (linguistic) consciousness. This was the situation that the artist tried to realize through his performative lecture.

FOR INSTANCE, this situation here. I speak and my words are synchronically translated, in a completely automatic and immediate way, into flickering of light. Words and all other sounds on equal rights (the mechanism does not discriminate). To link oneself to the world through an additional, parallel channel, like this one here. It is not used in practical life and cannot replace the channels we use every day. But, it is because this channel is unused and incomprehensible that it is pure, unprogrammed and unlimited. I mean, it does limit, because there is some limit to its possibilities, but at least it does not have any limits coming from outside the system.[22]

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[21] After ibid., p. 81.

[22] After ibid., p. 82.

As a speech act, this lecture fully deserves to be dubbed as "theory-practice": Bruszewski's words communicated his artistic theory, at the same time implementing it. They described, as linguistic signs, the possibility of connecting to the world through a "different channel," and this was what they were doing in their material performativity – they were causally interacting, as sounds, with the lighting of the room in which the lecture was taking place. The "translation" of sound into light was performed by a machine beyond the control of human consciousness. Moreover, there was an asymmetrical "feedback loop" operating here between the words as linguistic signs and words as material sounds. The sound of the words, generated during their reading from a piece of paper, caused the light to automatically turn on, which enabled further excerpts of text to be seen and read. The word-linguistic sign was thus dependent on the word-sound – that is, on itself. We could also speak here of asymmetrical self-referencing: when reporting the situation, the word referred to itself as something else, as a material and extralinguistic object in "contact with the external."

In the late seventies and early eighties, in several of his works, Bruszewski created the effect of an automatic "exchange" of words with a desemanticized audio message. In order to achieve this, he constructed receiving and reproducing devices, modified their construction, and supplemented them with "appendages" of his own design – all in order to exceed their conventional way of use, determined and imposed by the culture of the word. In *Muzyka telewizyjna (TV Music)* (1978) and *Telewizyjna kura (Television Chicken)* (1979), a TV show's verbal message was replaced by automatically generated, asemantic sounds. An "appendage" attached to the receiver

was responsible for their production: with the use of sensors it read the brightness of the image in a given fragment of the screen and translated the visual signals to sounds of appropriate volume.[23] *Sternmusik* (1978) is a work based on a similar idea. Here the artist used a "sonic camera," which generated sounds automatically, based on visual data – the text of a newspaper. Another example of an "expanded" technical device was *Gramofon czteroramienny (Four-Armed Record Player)* (1981). Its needles played a recording from several places on a record simultaneously, creating – depending on the type of material used – a cacophony or new sound compositions. During its premiere presentation, the record player played, or rather "replayed," a recording of poems by Cyprian Kamil Norwid.[24]

In the eighties Bruszewski also returned to his earlier experiments with generating "new words." Once again, he reached out to Borges's combinatorial method. He wanted to use it to design and build a more advanced textual machine which would, in a fully automatic manner, generate new words – not single words, but entire sequences, forming new works of poetry. This time the artist chose to feature his thoughts on language, the culture of the word, and technical devices, opening access to the world and shaping its experience within the context of experimental poetry writing.

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[23] In the context of the People's Republic of Poland at the end of the seventies this work can be also read as criticism of the "propaganda hammer," which was the TV "culture of the word" at that time.

[24] Cf. **W. Bruszewski**, *Sonety*, op. cit., and J. Zagrodzki, *Wojciech Bruszewski (8 marca 1947 – 6 września 2009)*, op. cit., p. 166.

(…) I do not have the appropriate poetic tools or material for making poetry. It is so because language has become corrupted and serves other purposes. This insulting opinion, expressed by Terry Fox, does not only concern the Polish language, but all contemporary languages used by the culture of the word (…) / How to write poetry in such conditions? / First of all, one needs to think about new tools. / But how can my mind, limited by convention and custom, religion in childhood and the hammer of propaganda in adult age, do this? The work needs to be entrusted to chance. Let blind fortune say something meaningful, something that will reveal unused areas of our mind, pure and uninfected regions of it.[25]

THIS TASK was to be fulfilled by *Maszyna poetycka (Poetry Machine)* (1982-1984). Bruszewski developed the idea and technical design for a device based on electronic integrated circuits: it was a light board with a row of twelve letter displays made from electronically steered fluorescent lamps. The function of the random mechanism was fulfilled by a white noise generator and electronic circuits translating its impulses into the displaying of particular letters.[26]

The letter set was limited to the vowels A, E, O, U and consonants

[25] **W. Bruszewski**, *Maszyna poetycka* (text dated November 11th 1984, rewritten on computer, with notes added in 1992), M. Kamińska-Bruszewska's archive.

[26] "The noise generator produced only shorter and longer impulses, which were counted for a given time period. This way, random numbers were obtained, and then 'translated' by the electronic circuit into letters shown on the display" (**A. Pająk**, *Współczesne generatory cyfrowe, Perspektywy Kulturoznawcze* 2009, no. 2 *(online)*, <http://www.pkult.amu.edu.pl/publikacja/A.%20Pajak,%20Wspolczesne%20generatory%20cyfrowe.pdf> (access: September 10th, 2013)).

N, R, P, S, L, C, F, H. The vowels and consonants were assigned fixed places in the row and their succession was designed in such a way that the randomly generated sentences would be pronounceable. The spaces between the words were also subject to random selection, although in a limited way, so that the row of letters would always be divided into two or three words.[27] Every sequence of four consecutive "sentences" was to form a single piece of poetry, with an AABB structure. The rhyme was achieved through the repetition of the three last letters of the preceding line. The device was to operate on a continuous basis. The artist underlined:

> (…) apart from correct possible sentences in natural languages, the Machine generates mostly rhyming sentences in a nonexistent language. This language, as a new object of unknown properties, can be a tool of poetry, which for a certain time will be free from incapacitation.[28]

THE MACHINE was not built at the time. A few years later, a computer program simulating its work was written, although with some modifications – it generated and displayed onscreen the entire four-line piece, which was later read with an "American" accent by a speech synthesizer. The project was further developed in *Sonety (Sonnets)* (1992). The computer first randomly chose one of the two traditional structures of this type of piece genre, ABBA ABBA AA BB CC or ABBA ABBA ABC ABC, and then, using the entire Latin alphabet, generated series of letters of one to eight characters in length. In order to make the words produced pronounceable by a Polish speaker, Bruszewski introduced a rule

[27] "For every randomly selected string of letters the displays no. 5 and no. 6 light up alternatively. The displays no. 8 and no. 9 take three possible states: either 8 or 9 is alight, or both are at once" (W. Bruszewski, *Maszyna poetycka*, op. cit.).

[28] Ibid.

according to which two consonants had to be followed by a vowel. Rhymes were produced through copying the three last characters in the line, according to the structure of the sonnet. The title of the work was created through the repetition of the first three words and addition of dots. The computer annotated every poem with the date and time of its production.[29] The first sonnet *Yk dog fudc…* was generated on March 18th, 1992 at 9:46 PM, and its first lines were:

> Yk dog fudc ana iffulci faz re ztyw,
>
> Pa dygl pa af tnap pnygacr iz ygofabe.
>
> Ga yzmopy apols gaqnynz pobomaj vfuabe,
>
> Tedu amquci obe e dyjneb e ud urmutyw.

In 1992, a short film was made with the actor Leon Niemczyk performing a dramatic reading of *Yk dog fudc…* with seriousness, commitment and unquestionable mastery, with Wojciech Bruszewski accompanying him on the piano. A few years later, in 1996, several poems were recited in Budapest by the Hungarian actor Tibor Kristóf. At that time, Bruszewski presented his *Sonnets* in the form of a computer installation: the generated work was simultaneously projected on a computer screen, read by a speech synthesizer and printed on a dot-matrix printer on continuous paper, which lay in scrolls on the floor of the gallery. Several versions of this installation came into being; they were titled depending on the location of the exposition: *Sonety Budapeszteńskie (Budapest Sonnets)*, *Sonety Wrocławskie (Wrocław Sonnets)*, *Sonety Lipskie*

[29] **W. Bruszewski**, *Sonety*, op. cit. The Amiga 2000 computer generated two such pieces per minute, so the first collection of *Sonnets*, containing three hundred fifty-nine poems, took an entire night to generate. The next day it was printed and bound. The same procedure was applied for the next seven volumes of poems, but, thanks to the use of a faster computer (Amiga 4000), the time needed for generating a complete volume was reduced to two hours (cf. ibid.).

Yk dog fude ...

Yk dog fude aua iffulci faz re ztyw,
Pa dygl pa af tnap pnyqacr iz ygofabe.
Ga yzmopy apoles gaqnynz pobomaj vfuabe,
Tedu amquci obe e dyjneb e ud urmutyw.

Ejmnjcu ebgygeb pa boz u eqod dcukeva,
Hwy toev izyrhac adh hpidzoh nyzihih.
Czipciz cwamsyp tfawo ij fectocq jhujhih,
Akelco u oqbotin tpe o syhut i eeva.

Gib vzacom atfyhva edo qevnifw yvbesvo,
Wme dvyv gly inijatv fiqiqfo didysvo,
Ykcagho jasu ytke i abap aga y vuhr.
Min ino a nti tuylegh qjywgu sja kukauhr,
Furn pohc iqvarva iqikby yocy gazwob,
Ze nanv nqiburno iryfuma ijc edg obhawoh.

[21.46]

(Leipzig Sonnets) and *Sonety Warszawskie (Warsaw Sonnets)*.[30]

The computer also became a philosophical machine, or, more precisely, a machine remediating philosophy. In the late eighties and early nineties, Bruszewski realized in West Berlin a project called *Radio Ruiny Sztuki (Radio Ruins of Art)*. It was an English-language radio broadcast lasting for over five years (1988-1993), titled *Nieskończona rozmowa (The Infinite Talk)*, in which synthesized voices pronouncing random quotations from the writings of great philosophers led a discussion about infinity.

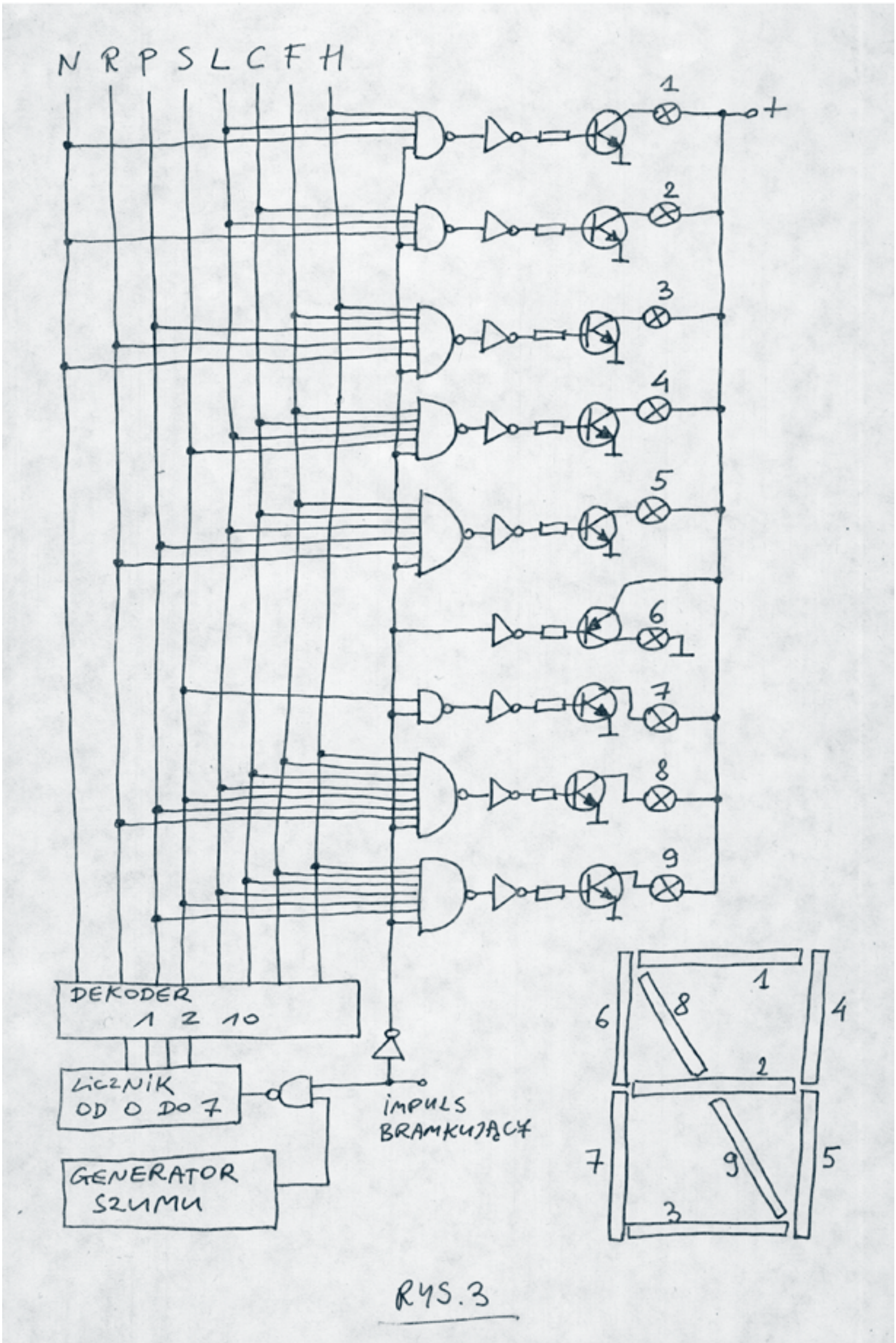
The conversation was led by two characters – Gary and Paula – and the texts, which are a "rough cut" through world philosophical literature, were recited by a computer. It recited them by randomly selecting consecutive fragments, so despite a finite body of knowledge, random encounters between Plato, Schopenhauer, Gödl, Chuang Tzu, James, Russel and other Great Philosophers could produce unexpected New Thoughts.[31]

It is possible that, if such a thing really occurred, the inventiveness of the machine would let us think what for ourselves remains unthinkable.

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[30] Cf. ibid.

[31] After: **J. Zagrodzki**, *Wojciech Bruszewski (8 marca 1947 – 6 września 2009)*, op. cit., p. 181. The project was then continued in Polish, later taking the form of *Monolog (Monologue)* (1994), at the East Gallery in Łódź.


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WOJCIECH BRUSZEWSKI AND CYBERTEXT

AN UNWRITTEN PAGE IN THE HISTORY OF ERGODIC LITERATURE

Mariusz Pisarski

Fifteen years ago, Espen Aarseth's theory of cybertext revolutionized our thinking about avant-garde cybernetic literature, providing a typological matrix able to incorporate all conceivable instances of ergodic literature[1]. At present, the development of this idea has reached a peculiar stage. On one hand, this theory has become one of the canonical works of digital humanities, part of its methodological arsenal; on the other hand, as a theory not yet classic enough and no longer excitingly new, it seems to have entered a phase of decline. It is less frequently cited by new research on how poetry and prose expands the literary message through various means, including creative use of the computer, physical space, combinatorics. However, each time when the molecular level, i.e. the precise mechanics of a work, is being discussed, Aarseth's categories prove the fastest way to clarify the details and explain misunderstandings during presentations, exhibitions, conferences and collaborative creative projects.

Unfortunately, this common language may become lost if we cease to use it to explain new examples of literature that

1 Cf. **E. Aarseth**, *Cybertext. Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, Baltimore 1997.

produces varieties of expression. Aarseth's original typology was modeled mostly on English-language literature; however, later, the "Cybertext Yearbook" published at the Jyväskylä University presented cybertexts and ergodic works of European, South American and Middle Eastern literature in its thematic issues (including Polish literature in the 2010 issue). This essay aims to examine the work of an artist whose projects merit further scholarly interest and research from a cybernetic perspective, even if they have already undergone some degree of such analysis[2]. The person in question is Wojciech Bruszewski. Throughout his lifelong artistic quest – focused on the relations between reality and nature and their mediations by language, art and media – this artist, director, photographer, poet and writer reached for mechanical and combinatorial ways of generating artistic messages.

Art critics believe that in his installations, films and objects, one of Bruszewski's goals was to stimulate the viewer with the "number of surprising solutions". In practice, this desired plurality of outcomes meant presenting parallel ways of expressing the same work, and invites an interpretation in the spirit of cybertext, which is defined by Aarseth as "a machine for the production of variety of expression"[3].

In Bruszewski's objects, as well as in the examples of cybertext cited by the Norwegian researcher, the variety in question is not identical with multiple meanings or interpretation, but is based

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2 Cf. **A. Pająk**, "Polish IV. Modern Generators", *Cybertext Yearbook* 2010, no. 7 (*online*), <http://cybertext.hum.jyu.fi/index.php?browsebook=7> (access: September 10, 2013).

3 **E. Aarseth**, ibid.

on the actual multiplied courses of the reception of the work. They are created mechanically, by machines (digital, analog or cinematographic ones) or by a human person following the work's algorithm.

Bruszewski's cybertext artistic strategies gave birth to a number of bold, extravagant, brilliantly simple and thought-provoking projects. The most eloquent and representative example is *Gramofon czteroramienny* (*Four-Armed Record Player*) from 1981. In its first version it was an analog disc with poetry by Cyprian Kamil Norwid played by four needles simultaneously. This work emphatically illustrates Bruszewski's approach to his art and to his viewer – a non-compromising approach, full of flare, with ever-present humor and a note of irony. If *Gramofon czteroramienny* were to be shown at festivals and exhibitions devoted to electronic literature it would be probably read as a more or less biting parody of cybertext; and at the same time it would constitute an acceptable illustration of the paradigm.

To locate Bruszewski's generative art on the map of cybertext literature we have to broaden the general definition of this phenomenon (for the time being, I have described it here, after the Norwegian researcher, as a machine for the production of variety of expression) with necessary additional categories. Cybertext, according to Aarseth, is an object that presents the reader its text as a result of a certain calculation, as the result of a mechanism incorporated within the work (a computational process, a verbalized rule). To understand this model we have to introduce the division of the work into text units before the calculation and after it: textons and scriptons. As Markku Eskelinen explains:

> The elementary idea is to see a text as a concrete (and not metaphorical) machine consisting of the medium, the operator, and the strings of signs. The latter are divided into textons (strings of signs as they are in the text) and scriptons (strings of signs as they appear to readers/users). The mechanism by which scriptons are generated or revealed from textons is called a traversal function, which is described as the combination of seven variables (dynamics, determinability, transience, perspective, links, access, and user function), and their possible values.[4].

The first of these seven variables, dynamics, indicates whether the text is static (i.e. has the same number of textons and scriptons) or dynamic (different number of textons and scriptons). Aarseth distinguishes intratextonic dynamics (IDT), where the number of scriptons changes, while the number of textons remains the same, and textonic dynamics (TDT), where the number of textons also varies. If the disc with Norwid's poetry in *Czteroramienny gramofon* is considered a database of textons, and the four needles a traversal function, that is the rule directing the performance of the project, and a single listening of the work as a string of scriptons, it becomes clear that the number of textons does not change. It is permanently inscribed on a vinyl disc. However, it suffices to remove one of the needles to change the number of scriptons, i.e. the fragments being read. *Czteroramienny gramofon* is thus a intertextonicly dynamic work.

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4 **M. Eskelinen**, *"Cybertext Theory and Literary Studies", A User's Manual, (online)*, <http://www.altx.com/ebr/ebr12/eskel.htm> (access: September 10, 2013).

The second variable, determinability, refers to the stability of the "transversal function". A text is determined when every scripton appears in the same context: it is preceded and succeeded by the same text fragments. If this does not occur, we are dealing with an undetermined text. In our case, a change in the position of any of the needles playing Norwid makes Bruszewski's poetic object undetermined. The same fragments of the recited text may thus appear in multiple contexts. Having established that *Czteroramienny gramofon* is an undetermined work with IDT dynamics we can already conclude that it is a work demonstrating a rather high level of "cybertextuality"[5].

The third variable, transience, refers to the temporal aspect of the text-machine. If the creation of strings of scriptons is the result of the mere passing of time, the object is considered intransient. If it is otherwise, and the reader needs to perform a certain gesture to continue the reading, we are dealing with intransience. Playing a vinyl record is a process that occurs in time, so *Czteroramienny gramofon* belongs to transient cybertexts. However, the situation can be complicated.

Let's suppose that Bruszewski added a rule according to which the listener would have to intervene each time one of the needles reached the end of the disc; for example, by moving it towards the beginning. Would we then consider this poetic machine an intransient one? Very likely so.

Perspective, the fourth variable, refers not so much to the narrative perspective in general as to its specific cybertext breed. And so,

5 An identical combination of the first two variables (IDT and indeterminacy) characterizes the book game by Mark Smith and Jamie Thompson, *Falcon*, described by Espen Aerseth. The lack of determinability was achieved in it through the introduction of dice-throwing as a means of guiding the reader-player through different narrative paths. E. Aarseth, op. cit., p. 66.

if the text requires the reader to play a strategic role in a fictional world we speak of a personal perspective. Otherwise – the perspective is impersonal. This first option is out of question in the case of Bruszewski's installation: the recited poems constitute separate worlds, in which all the roles have been long since assigned.

The fifth variable in the cybertext typology is access. If all the scriptons of the text machine are made available to the user, who can read them at any time and without any limitation, such free access to the text is described as random access. Otherwise we speak of access that is controlled by the author or by the mechanism of the text. Within this context, audial access to Bruszewski's cybertext is an exceptionally interesting case. Its transient, temporal character would indicate controlled access, similarly to the case of works such as *A Book of the Dead* by William Gibson or *Book Unbound* by John Cayley[6], played "in real time" on the screen of a computer. In theory, however, the listener-operator of *Czteroramienny gramofon* can move one of the needles and access another fragment of the recording. There appears one additional problem – legibility of access.

The text of Norwid's poems was mediated in an intriguing way, typical of Bruszewski, and, what is more, it was mediated twice: on the level of the material carrier (the viewer sees only black grooves on the vinyl surface) and on the level of the semiotic channel (declamation and recording). In *Czteroramienny gramofon* free random access, which Aarseth rightfully assigns primarily to printed

6 The typology in this article is modeled after the typology presented by Aarseth on page 64 in the book *Cybertext. Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, where the cybertext matrix of seven variables and their various values was used to analyze twenty-three examples of digital and print literature.

books, which can be leafed through in any order and according to any rule, is subject to a sort of multiplied media coding. To have random access to the message, the listener has to know how to decode it; for example, remember where the poem or stanza he wishes to play is located on the disc.

The sixth variable concerns linking, which does not appear in any form (permanent links, random links) in the discussed work. The seventh variable, however, the function of the user, directs us again to the questions of access, describing the level of interactivity of the work. Apart from the basic "interpretative" function present in every text, in cybertext, based on the findings of Michael Joyce[7], we also distinguish the explorative function, meaning that the user has to decide on his choice of paths and the configurative function, when some of the scriptons are selected or created by the user. If textons of traversal functions can be permanently added to the text, the actions of the user have a textonic character. The textonic function, assuming a real – and not only interpretative – contribution from the reader, determines the highest level of interactivity of the work. Is *Czteroramienny gramofon* interactive (and thus explorative), or does it allow us only the interpretation of its cacophonic string of scriptons? The answer depends on the form of reception designed by Bruszewski. Available sources indicate that during the first showings of the installation, the record player placed in a gallery only played the record. In this case the reader is left only with the interpretative function. However, from a purely phenomenological perspective, the four needles can be subject to manipulation. In such a case we can speak of an explorative function.

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7 **M. Joyce**, *Siren Shapes. Exploratory and Constructive Hypertexts*, (in:) *The New Media Reader*, N. Wardrip-Fruin, N. Montfort (eds.), Cambridge 2003, p. 614–616.

To conclude this short review of cybertext typology applied to a single project by Bruszewski, we can describe *Czteroramienny gramofon* as a work that is dynamic (with an unchangeable number of textons and variable number of scriptons), undetermined, transient, with an impersonal perspective, random access and explorative function of the reader. However, it has to be stipulated that the last two variables will have the indicated value only if the record player is handed to the user with an invitation to interact or if the author, while presenting his work at a gallery, assumes the role of the single operator. Otherwise, if the project takes the form of a record player concert for four needles, we have to speak of controlled access and an interpretative function of the reader.

The problem of the layered formula of cybertexts in the case of objects that have potential for interactivity and are shown in physical space was not considered in the design of the theory of cybertext. Aarseth almost exclusively used examples of works in which the relation with the user was permanently fixed[8] and they were read individually by every one of them. Spatializing the

8 When discussing cybertext we should completely stop speaking of a pact with the reader and consider the potential of the work as a system more pertinent than particular uses of the text-machine. Bruszewski's objects are a good illustration of this issue: if the record player needles can be manipulated we should consider that the work is being manipulated regardless if it is presented in the form of one model reading (for example, a non-interactive presentation of a single enactment of the work controlled by the artist). This problem is illustrated by the discussion *Clarifying „Ergodic" and „Cybertext"* on the Grand Text Auto blog, where Noah Wardrip-Fruin questioned the dynamics and indeterminacy of the game Money Spider. As it turned out (after the replies from Espen Aarseth and Nick Montfort), the reason of the misunderstanding was that Wardrip-Fruin considered a single use of the text and not its potential as a system (perhaps not clearly visible for persons who are not IT specialists). Cf. N. Wardrip-Fruin, *Clarifying „Ergodic" and „Cybertext" (online)*, <http://grandtextauto.org/2005/08/12/clarifying-ergodic-and-cybertext> (access: September 10, 2013).



New Word Machine

object, as Bruszewski demonstrates, introduces into the cybertext matrix previously unconsidered circumstances.

The creation of *Nowe słowa (New Words)* in 1972, began a period in Bruszewski's career where his works explored generative, random and combinatorial creative methods. *Nowe słowa* was a sort of poetic toy. It was composed of five little cubes on a metal axis (it resembled the numerical ciphers used to protect, for example, suitcases). Each of them had four sides, on which there were letters – instead of numbers. Two cubes contained vowels and three had consonants. By turning them, the user created words. Although Bruszewski fixed the original order of the cubes (vowel – consonant – consonant – vowel – consonant) to make all the newly created words easily pronounceable (like the words featured in the illustration – "ortib" and "ebgik"), individual elements of this poetic invention could be removed and rearranged on the axis in any order. Thus, theoretically, by manipulating the cubes and changing their order it was possible to obtain 122 880 new words[9].

According to the typology of cybertext theory, *Nowe słowa* is a poetic machine that can be characterized as: static, determined, instransient, with an impersonal perspective, random access to scriptons, unlinked and assigning the reader to the configurative function. As such, Wojciech Bruszewski's work situates itself in the same position as Raymond Queneau's *A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems* and close to *The Unfortunates* by Brian Stanley Johnson. The most interesting differences between these works are demonstrated on the level of the second variable, ability to determine. *The Unfortunates*, being a novel in a box, presented as loose sheets that the reader can shuffle and arrange at will into new sequences, is an undetermined work. However,

9 Cf. **A. Pająk**, op. cit.

Queneau's work is determined, similarly to *Nowe słowa*. Although both works are highly subject to configuration, their transversal function is stable. The sonnets, which play the role of scriptons in *A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*, always maintain their place relative to one another, even though their content, individual poems and their contexts, changes. Thus, Aarseth considers such a work determined. The case is similar in Nowe słowa: a word formed from individual letters will always be in the same position in relation to other scriptons, because they are built from permanently engraved blocks and assigned to a fixed value, a letter.

The impact of *Nowe słowa* on Bruszewski's later work was significant. The author himself admits that a number of his projects are "a consequence" of this particular work. *Sonety (Sonnets)* from 1992, is the most well-known installation which continued the generative aspects of *Nowe słowa*, this time with the use of computers. This computer-aided multimodal project, in which the text generated on the screen was simultaneously printed in book format and read by a speech synthesizer or an invited actor proved to be one of the most spectacular and memorable of Bruszewski's performances, even more so since it changed its name depending on the location of the exhibition. Thus, there were *Leipzig Sonnets* (Leipzig, Medienbiennale, 1992), *Wrocław Sonnets* (Wrocław, WRO festival, 1993), *Budapest Sonnets* (Budapest, The Butterfly Effect, 1996) and *Warsaw Sonnets* (Warszawa, collection of Centrum Sztuki Współczesnej, 1993).

Additionally, eight volumes of *Sonety* were published in print (1992). An Amiga computer programmed by Bruszewski selected strings of vowels and consonants[10]

[10] Cf. the description of the project on the author's webpage: <http://web.archive.org/web/20110611095001/http://www.voytek.pl> (access: September 10, 2013).

at random, although there were "certain limitations" introduced by the author. The letters – after forming words of one to eight letters in length – arranged themselves into one of the two classic sonnet forms. To include rhymes, the three letters of each line were copied and inserted at the end of the appropriate line, depending on the chosen structure of the sonnet. The title in turn was obtained by copying the first three words of the first line and adding dots. The beginning of the first sonnet generated during the premiere installation in 1992 read as follows:

Yk dog fudc ana iffulci faz re ztyw,

Pa dygl pa af tnap pnyqacr iz ygofabe.

Ga yzmopy apoles gaqnynz pobomaj vfuabe,

Tedu amquci obe e dyjneb e ud urmutyw.

Sonety by Wojciech Bruszewski – in the cybertext view – appears as a dynamic work (of IDT dynamics), undetermined, transient, of impersonal perspective, controlled access and assigning the reader an interpretative function.

The rules and limitations that the author introduced are not fully known. Apart from the rules directing the generation of rhymes and titles, Bruszewski warranted that consonant clusters can have a maximum of two elements. In his description of the unrealized analog prototype of *Sonety*, *Maszyna poetycka (Poetry Machine)* from 1982, the author remarked that if we assumed that the machine worked continuously, and a single line took three seconds to generate, the first repeated sentence

would appear after three hundred years. From the cybertext point of view, Sonety may aspire to the name of the final generator of poetic works, by far surpassing the combinatorial capacity of *A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems*.

If the three cybertexts by Bruszewski discussed in this article were to be applied to Aarseth's typological matrix, the differences between them and the combinatorially similar works of Johnson and Queneau would be as presented in the following table:

	DYNAMICS	DETERMINABILITY	TRANSIENCE	PERSPECTIVE	ACCESS	LINKS	USER FUNCTION
	IDT	determined	transient	impersonal	controlled (random)	Does not apply	explorative
NOWE SŁOWA	static	determined	intransient	Impersonal	random	Does not apply	configurative
SONETY	IDT	undetermined	transient	impersonal	controlled	Does not apply	interpretative
A HUNDRED THOUSAND BILLION POEMS	static	determined	intransient	impersonal	random	Does not apply	configurative
THE UNFORTUNATES	static	undetermined	intransient	impersonal	random	Does not apply	interpretative

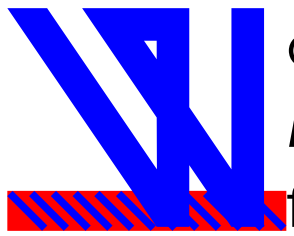


Bruszewski's later cybertexts, such as like *Romantica* (1989–1990) and *Radio Ruiny Sztuki (Radio Ruins of Art)* (1988–1993), follow the path set out by *Maszyna poetycka* and *Sonety* with a visible and significant tendency to uphold dynamism and limit the interventions of the user and operator. *Radio Ruiny Sztuki* is perhaps the best example of this trend. It was an audio generator of quotations from philosophical works, the stream of which was divided into two synthesized voices, broadcast throughout several years by a specially created station.

Although the capacity for determining was permanently limited, because the number of quotations was fixed, and there was no room for intervention from the user, this work perfectly exemplified the premises of a work that can last forever. *Monolog* from 1994 further addresses this subject as a cybertext spatial installation, a philosophical labyrinth of twelve floors and eight rooms randomly chosen by the operator (Gary, the synthesized partner of Paula from the project *Radio Ruiny Sztuki*), and is another example of an ergodic work, which when compared to the examples studied in *Cybertext. Perspectives on Ergodic Literature* has to be considered an exceptionally original, or even subversive, work. However, I will not go further than mentioning it – it is a project that merits a separate presentation.

ON WOJCIECH BRUSZEWSKI'S BIG DICK

Joanna Ostrowska



ojciech Bruszewski's performative novel entitled *Big Dick* is – as the author himself explains – documental fiction, a particular fairy tale for adults, bursting with blasphemous and provocative content. Never before has the Polish publishing market seen a literary text of this kind: a text which so evocatively refers to "image" and visual culture. Also, in terms of breaking all kinds of taboos, Bruszewski, known primarily as a visual artist, filmmaker and performer, in his last "work," *Big Dick*, strove to transfer his artistic fascinations into literature. His book can be characterized as a kind of interdisciplinary "fan footage," in which images are the starting points for telling an alternative history, a "history that never happened" (after Alexander Demandt).



n the narrative level, *Big Dick* resembles the project of a "great novel" of the 20th century. The main role in this type of work is played by an irrationally composed hero, constructed with historical facts that shape his existence and personality – he is meant to symbolically represent the past one hundred years. The narration of *The Kindly Ones* by Jonathan Littell (Prix Goncourt) is structured in a very similar manner. Dick, a "stateless man," resembles Littell's Max Aue.

Bruszewski uses facts and historical figures in order to create a modern version of history. He uses archival materials as well as contemporary photographs and film footage, adapting them to his own vision of the history of Poland and the world. On the "visual level" his work is reminiscent of, among others, Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne-Atlas*. However, in Bruszewski's case this level is found on the Internet, available only to those who have read the text of the book (indications/codes). Bold juggling of facts and historical figures, and use of the history of everyday life and anecdote as the main ways of telling the story of the past are mechanisms questioning the available archival sources of a given era. The author of *Big Dick* considers them suspicious. Using his protagonist, and creating an alternative version of the history of the 20th century, Bruszewski breaks with historical clichés (and also visual ones), through which the readers/viewers recognize the past. His narrative is a constant search for reasons – an investigation questioning the idea of the political history of a nation.

Bruszewski's surreal, sometimes improbable "parables" stem from commonly known facts. The author is not afraid of using the figures of well-known people (including Lech Kaczyński, Izabela Cywińska and Bill Gates), noting that his characters have nothing in common with them except their names, the resemblance of which is the result of "mixing languages" (cultural codes) and history. The historical system according to Bruszewski is an incessantly changing and evolving hybrid, in which a single, at first sight insignificant, event on one end of the world can influence the fate of a community on the other side of the globe.

In such a context, subjects widely considered as controversial become something "normal." Tracking the swastika, and reversing commonly recognized symbols, conspiracies and assaults prove to be part of a reflection on postcolonialism, totalitarianism, apartheid, racism and popular culture, which introduces ubiquitous information chaos.

Wojciech Bruszewski's *Big Dick* stems also from cinematic ambitions. The hybrid, multi-layered, sometimes surreal and absurd narrative resembles the works of Jean-Pierre Jeunet or Quentin Tarantino (*Inglourious Basterds*). The text of the book together with the Internet "collection of curiosities" can be treated as a new type of interactive film script. The German director Ulrike Ottinger prepared her scripts and screenplays in a way very similar to Bruszewski's work method.

The novel *Big Dick* is one of the most daring and innovative works published in the last few years. The intermedial character of Bruszewski's volume constitutes a starting point for the creation of entirely new narratives, in which (like on the Internet) what counts the most is "multifunctionality" and "information chaos."

BIG DICK BY WOJCIECH BRUSZEWSKI

Mariusz Pisarski

Wojciech Bruszewski's half-print, half-online documentary fiction entitled *Big Dick* (Korporacja Ha!art) has just hit the bookstores. This novel by the pioneer of Polish video art and new media is a multithreaded, panoramic and digressive narrative about the adventures of Richard von Hakenkreuz. The main character is a mysterious man who comes to Europe from a small South African town at the beginning of the 20th century bringing with him the swastika… This explosive mix of butterfly effect poetics, postmodern historiography and digital reincarnations of disturbing icons of the past century has all that it takes to become a classic of Polish new – and old – media literature. Although the "plot" stretches throughout the entire 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, the real "action" takes place in the mind of the reader, which is bombarded with a bold combination of facts, characters, anecdotes and spaciotemporal twists.

The author incorporated forty-four codes into his book. They give the reader access to a digital archive on the author's website. This online archive is comprised of audiovisual loops that illustrate, comment on and supplement the main text. It features clips showing the self-immolation of Ryszard Siwiec at the Warsaw 10th-

Anniversary Stadium (Polish: *Stadion Dziesięciolecia*), photographs of a town called Swastika in Ontario, the American Miss Nazi of 1968 or a photo of an e-mail advertising penis-enlargement treatments (referenced in the title). Bruszewski's digital glossolalia intensify the book's aura of parody and invite the reader into a world of historical conspiracy theories, with hidden affiliations of symbols and unexpected links between different points in space and time. The narrative style is visibly inspired by a fascination with leaps from one subject to another, from text to image, from anecdote to encyclopedic note – a type of reading typical of surfing the Web. Bruszewski's literary mastery is apparent in the vertigo-inducing ease with which the reader is transported from America to Europe, from an African jungle to an electric chair in Texas, all without loss of cohesion. This is also proof that we are witnessing the birth of a new poetics, inspired by the hypertext nature of the World Wide Web. The "electronic library" accompanying the work compensates for those aspects of the experience of surfing the web that were impossible to imitate in print. Let us look at one fragment of the novel with two codes, which can be used by the reader to activate audiovisual clips on the website www.bigdick.pl:

A team of researchers from Zurich University have gotten down to intensive work. A photograph of two women on a hammock shown to them at the last minute set the course of their proceedings. Instead of performing in-depth analysis they speckled the text with images. One of the most attractive ones is a picture of Jacqueline Bouvier in an Indian costume. She has an impressive swastika on her belly.

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Several years will pass before the girl discovers that each and every photo of Jacqueline goes down into history. As the wife of JFK and US's first lady she will start choosing her outfits and jewelry with greater care.

Another interesting photograph shows Medore Moisant, an American pioneer of aviation.

During the 1911 Garden City aviation show she broke the world record flying at a height of 1200 feet. She used to hang a swastika on her neck "for good luck".

12081764906

On April14, 1912, in Wichita Falls, Texas, her plane crashed. Reportedly, after she was rescued from the shattered remains of the plane she said:
– This had to happen. I lost my jewelry box this morning.

This book is a must read. It is incomparable to any other work of Polish fiction. If anything, it brings to mind the achievements of Thomas Pynchon, Salman Rushdie, Kurt Vonnegut (very close to Bruszewski, both in the American-German topical matter and the writing style itself), and other world-class postmodernists. In this context, *Big Dick* will strengthen Bruszewski's position as a performer, author of installations, painter, experimental musician, dramatist and a brilliant writer. I highly recommend this novel!

BIOS

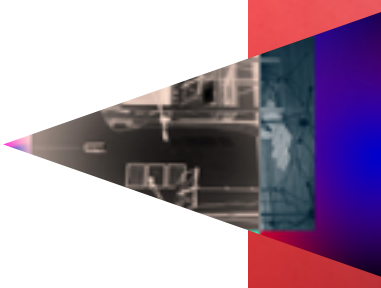


Piotr Marecki

Expert in cultural studies, publisher (Ha!art publishing house), editor, and lecturer in the Department of Contemporary Culture at the Institute of Culture at the Jagiellonian University, and at the Polish National Film, Television and Theater School (PWSFTviT) in Łódź and the Kraków School of Screenwriting. His interests include Polish literature after 1989, independent culture, new media literature, film adaptations, and screenwriting. Member of the Electronic Literature Organization. 2013 Fulbright scholar.

Joanna Ostrowska

PhD student at the Department of Jewish Studies at the Jagiellonian University. An MA graduate of Film Theory at the Jagiellonian University, of film and TV production at the Film and Theatre School (PWSFTviT) in Łodz and of Gender Studies at the Warsaw University. A member of Krytyka Polityczna (Political Critique). She is currently doing research on forced prostitution and sexual violence in Poland during the Second World War.



Mariusz Pisarski

Founder and chief editor of "Techsty" – an online journal publishing hypertext fiction and poetry. Creative director for

e-literature published by Korporacja Ha!art, author of *Xanadu. Hypertext metamorphoses of the novel* (2013). His electronic literature translations include Hegirascope by Stuart Moulthrop and collaborative opus magnum: *afternoon, a story* by Michael Joyce (with Radosław Nowakowski and Jakub Jagiełło). Editor of Michael Joyce: a Polish writer – a chapbook, and Literary hypertexts. Literature and the New Media (with Piotr Marecki). Member of the Association for Computing Machinery. He holds a PhD degree on hypertext from Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan. He currently lives in London.

Tomasz Zatuski

Art historian and philosopher, lectures at the Institute of Contemporary Culture at the Łódź University and at the Department of Art History and Art Theory at the Wladyslaw Strzeminski Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź.

His research interests include modern and contemporary artistic practice, the relations between art praxeology and biopolitics, the configurations of esthetics, ethics and politics in the cultural project of modernity, contemporary French philosophy (especially that of Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy).

He is author of the book *Modernizm artystyczny i powtórzenie. Próba reinterpretacji* (2008) devoted to modernism in art, the editor of the volume *Sztuki w przestrzeni transmedialnej* (2010) on art in transmedia environment. In 2010 he translated Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community into Polish* (together with Michał Gusin).

